

DEATH OF HENRY CLAY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED, BY REQUEST,

IN

TRINITY CHURCH, EASTON,

ON

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

JULY 4th, 1852.

BY

The Rector,

REV. JOSEPH I. ELSEGOOD, A. M.



EASTON, PA.

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EASTON, July 10th, 1852.

DEAR SIR :—

The undersigned, having been much impressed with the beauty and propriety of your discourse on the life and services of Henry Clay, respectfully solicit a copy for publication.

Very truly yours,

A. E. BROWN,
WILLIAM LEE,
T. R. SITGREAVES,
WASHINGTON MILLS,
J. H. COOK.

REV. JOSEPH I. ELSEGOOD.

RECTORY, EASTON, July 15, 1852.

GENTLEMEN :—

The discourse, which you have been pleased to notice thus favorably, was prepared without the remotest expectation that it would be desired for publication, and is, as its author thinks, of the most unpretending character. Yet if, by his yielding to your solicitation, he may, to some extent, gratify those, to whom he feels himself under many obligations, it is herewith cheerfully placed at your disposal.

Very affectionately yours,

JOSEPH I. ELSEGOOD,
Rector of Trinity Church.

MESSRS. A. E. BROWN,
" WILLIAM LEE,
" T. R. SITGREAVES,
" W. MILLS,
" J. H. COOK.



DISCOURSE.

"She goeth unto the grave to weep there."—*John*, xi. chap. 31 verse—latter clause.

Truly touching was the scene to which these words add their simple tribute:—to find one more so—one which makes its way more directly to the best feelings of the heart—is hardly, we think, possible in all the compass of history, sacred or profane. The recent death of Lazarus, one whom Jesus tenderly loved—the deep affliction of his bereaved sisters—the sincere and undisguised sympathy of their countrymen—the tears of heart-felt grief shed by the blessed Redeemer over the gloomy lot of poor fallen human nature—altogether compose a picture over which, with real sorrow, many a good man has bowed lowly his head, and freely wept.

But this scene—how often, with more than ordinary clearness and force, is it brought home to our remembrance and thoughts! There are times which no sojourner in this toilsome vale of light and shade, of pleasure and pain, can hope to escape; times in which the sad bereavement of some well-loved object recalls forcibly to our minds the reality of those sufferings over which fell the tears of the Divine Redeemer; times which peremptorily turn away our feet from the abode of mirth to the darkened habitation of grief; or which bids us forth from the society of the living and the gay, with a worn and wearied spirit, like that of the afflicted Mary, to the silent grave of the departed, to weep there.

And such a time, we feel, is the one, in the midst of which, as a people, we are found to-day. A man, a patriot, and a Christian, has just been taken from us by death!—the "beauty of our Israel has been slain on her high places;" the mightiest of the mighty of our land has fallen;—our Henry Clay is no

more!—and we are solicited by a nation's grief, a grief common to us all, to gather, for a while, to his new-dug grave, and weep there.

And is it not well? The neglect of such a solicitation would have an unfriendly influence on virtue and public spirit. We know that the wisest and most renowned nations of the past have not only applauded, and voted thanks and triumphs to their illustrious citizens, while living, but have celebrated them, in eulogies, when dead: have deeply mourned their departed worth, and have erected altars of virtue, and monuments of honor, in order to perpetuate their names and deeds to succeeding ages and generations. Thus, in the best and palmiest days of their republics, did Greece and Rome: "and it was," says Thucydides, "the manner of the Egyptians, the fathers of arts and sciences, not only to duly recount and honor the names and actions of their departed worthies, but to embalm their bodies, that they might long be kept in public view, as examples of virtue, and, though dead, yet speaking."

Nor must these examples, at any time, be lost upon us; but more especially at the present time. One, whose life has been to us so valuable, whom we have learned to esteem and venerate so highly, may not pass for ever away from us in unbroken silence, or with a mere passing tribute of praise. For more than half a century, he has lived amongst and for us, as a people. With almost every enterprise and achievement, whereby, as a nation, we have become great, and prosperous, and happy, he has stood associated, either as its generous originator or efficient advocate. His life is, in an eminent sense, an historical one! Scarcely a public good do we enjoy that bears not the impress of his great name and intellect: scarcely an evil has threatened, or come upon us, that has not found in him its most determined enemy, and its most unwearied opposer. If, to-day, the cities, and towns, and villages, of our widely-extended country, wear a joyous, and busy, and a flourishing aspect, then, in him, in his true-hearted patriotism, is to be found the instrumental cause of so much good: if high regard, and honor, and reverence be entertained for, and bestowed upon us, from abroad, it is he chiefly that has won and secured them for us. We, indeed, go not too far, when we say that at the name of Henry Clay everything interesting to

virtue, to freedom, and also to humanity, rises at once, with a marked freshness, to our recollection. To illuminate the minds of his fellow-citizens, to imbue them with the necessary fact of their own significance, to nurse them into real greatness among the nations of the earth, to show them the vast extent of happiness which lay truly within their reach, to teach them to dare, to acquire, and then, to rightly bear and improve success—these were the noble ends for which he lived, and after which he faithfully, diligently, unremittingly labored. And it is his singular success, in this vast accumulation of difficult services, that has woven a diadem of beauty for his brow such as scarcely ever adorned the brow of another, either ancient or modern.

How little did the Richmond shopkeeper dream that the young orphan boy, one day committed to his care, was yet to prove so vast a benefit to his country; was yet to stand and influence its councils, and give shape to its destiny; was yet able to represent it before foreign powers, and with such men as Albert Gallitan, Jonathan Russel, James S. Bayard, and John Quincy Adams, amicably, nobly, and triumphantly adjust the perplexed difficulties of nations.*

He was, emphatically, our country's greatest, noblest, most admired son! The period at which he entered upon public life, and became properly identified with our nation's history, its rise and successful progress, was, as most who hear me know, a remarkable one: one marked by many and peculiar difficulties; but for the high and important sphere of human agency, to which, in the providence of God, he was summoned, he was eminently gifted. As a man, his reasoning powers were, confessedly, of the highest order. He had, if we may so speak, the power to penetrate subjects as by a momentary intuition, and to fetch into view, soon after he had commenced his search, those deeply hidden treasures of the intellectual mind, to the discovery and display of which, most men, of even acknowledged talent, must have employed an elaborate process. A profound metaphysician, it was his lot to be rivalled

* The commissioners appointed by President Madison to negotiate a treaty with envoys appointed by England, now known as *The Treaty of Ghent*.

by few, and to be surpassed by none. In all his speeches and compositions, (over which we have loved to pore,) whether in the council or the cabinet, we find the all-pervading presence of a sound judgment, a finished taste, and a rich imagination, accompanied with an unaffected simplicity and earnestness, which render them, at times, not merely grand, but inimitably so. He had all the attributes of genius, that rare and masterly faculty which it is far more easy for us to appreciate than to define. Although no academy, in his youth, had welcomed him to its shades, and no college had crowned him with its honors, his erudition, as a man, was that of the elegant scholar. With a bold determination, which was all his own, he lifted himself up to the highest gifts held out to his ardent gaze, and he obtained and made them truly his. As a speaker, he had formed his style on the purest models furnished by his own or earlier times, and he took pains with it, and wrought it into that force, and beauty, and plainness, which placed him first among the first of world-admired orators. With a voice truly surprising for its compass, and the entire control which he had over it, the character of his ideas, their lucid order, his happy choice of expressions, the rich melody of his tones, the rapidity of his utterance, the fire of his eye, the dignity of the cause which engaged him, the ardor of feeling with which he threw himself into it, drew from many a lip and heart, gathered about his noble and commanding person, the testimony which can neither be controverted nor suppressed.—This is eloquence—eloquence indeed.

The present is neither the time nor the place to speak minutely of his doings, or of the principles and reasons which swayed him in reference to them. This has been, and this must still be, the grateful task of others. All that we may do is to speak of them in general terms, and thus pay our tribute to his worth, at whose grave, we freely, with common consent, gather to weep.

What he was in public life he was also in private. He was as truly great in his own lovely retreat at Ashland, by his own hearth-side, in the centre of the domestic circle, or pursuing his ordinary avocations, as at the gay and busy Capitol, in the grave councils of his nation, and absorbed in the mightiest questions of empire. At home, every heart revered him,

every hand welcomed him, and every eye and countenance brightened at his approach;—abroad, an equable temper, attained by long and careful self-discipline, an easy, natural, all-controlling fascination of manner, his noble bearing and yet nobler deeds, won for him the esteem and veneration of all with whom he was found:—even the absent enemy, and even he had such, could not be the present one. He loved and was beloved by all, and thus the character of the great man was complete.

Would that we could yet have retained him amongst us! At a period of our nation's history so vast and momentous in interest as the present, when so much that is perplexing and startling is being pressed forward into public view, and demanding the consideration of our best minds, would that we could yet have retained amongst us one so great, so essential to our nation's good! But to do this we have not been privileged. The mandate, which was not to be reversed, had gone forth; and at the Seat of Government, *so fitting a place for the death of the nation's own*, full of years, full of honors, in full possession of all his faculties, with a firm faith in the Redeemer of mankind, in communion with our own branch of Christ's most holy church, calmly and gently he submitted to the inexorable summons, and proceeded on that journey whence no traveller returns. From west to east, from north to south, by land, and over the wide ocean to the utmost extent of the civilized globe, the melancholy intelligence has gone forth, that *our loved one*, the venerable statesman, the mature patriot, the glory of America, is no more! With the plaudits of the wise and good, their tears and heartfelt grief, he has received his dismissal, and passed away to that better land which God has prepared, and beautified, and blest for the eternal abiding-place of all who love him here. Peaceful and calm, and holy be the spot where shall repose his honored remains! marked be the place, and adorned with beauty, to which many a pilgrim's feet hereafter shall, with solemn reverence, turn! And here,—

“Sweet ivy twined with myrtle, form a shade
 Around the tomb where the patriarch's laid;
 Where, 'neath your boughs, shut from the beams of day,
 A nation's tears shall flow for Henry Clay!”

But we pause! We are not here, my brethren, merely to remember the worth of the departed; merely to fill our thoughts with what he was, but also to reflect upon what he now is: to learn the great truth over again, "That man, even in honor, abideth not;"—that "his days are but as a hands, breadth;"—that "his life is but as a vapor, a mere passing breath;" and from hence to learn, more surely, to put not our trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help—but in God, in whom alone there is help, and with whom alone there is everlasting strength.

Before our mind's eye is stretched the cold and inanimate form of the dead statesman; and in the presence of a spectacle so solemn, so humiliating, how forcibly are we taught the vanity of everything that is merely earthly in its nature! Exalted as may be the world's honors, attractive as may be its gifts, and nobly and rightfully as they may be won, the period during which they can be enjoyed is brief indeed; they either, like things unreal, glide stealthily away from their possessor, or he, as though they never were his, glides away from them. Well may we here clothe with inspired words our lips, and exclaim—"Man walketh but in a vain show." Yes, in a vain show, in a mere empty exhibition, each is but performing his lighter or more important part. Hardly have we made good our entry into the world ere we find it to be but one vast, complicated, and, in many respects, truly imposing drama. The men around us are the busy actors; and to succeed, each in his undertook part, is the only boon they ask; the only felicity they crave: to this they direct all their anxiety and hope, and for this they freely expend all their ingenuity, zeal, and strength. And yet, when all is over, what has it proved, but, as the illusive spectacle of a theatre, the illusion more prolonged indeed, and at a heavier expense, yet throughout, quite as unsubstantial. And then, the reward,—what, after all, have the actors, even the most successful, acquired for all their exertions?—a few light and momentary gratifications, without one lasting, substantial good for the dark and dreary time to come. Vain, showy, shadowy world! May we again compare it? It is like those thin, dissolving views produced by art, in which the eye beholds objects, most attractive and beautiful, while there is nothing to be either felt or handled. Do

we not prove this over and over again? We look forth, and many are the things which the world presents invitingly to our gaze; fitly are they arranged, and highly are they colored; and caught by their enticing aspect, we would be the first to press forward and possess them; we succeed in our efforts, but in the instant that we attempt to grasp our prize, it fades away and we see it no more;—there was in it nothing real. In like terms is the world described by St. Paul: “The fashion of it,” he tells us, “passeth away.” It is characterized by nothing permanent; its grandeur, its glory, its joys, and even its form, are all temporary, changing, and must pass quickly away. Such is the scene of our present being; the scene where alone we acquire and wear our short-lived honors; adorn and beautify it as we may, it is, after all, but an empty pageant—an illusive show!

But whence, it may be asked, comes this state of things? whence comes it that everything with which we have now to do is thus vain, thus unsubstantial, thus deceptive? Is this indeed the question—your question? The answer is at hand. It is because sin has gained an entrance into our world, overspread it with disorder, and made its affairs what they would not have been had our Eden innocence remained to us. Sin it is that has worked the widespread ruin, and opened our hearts to what is deceptive and false. Image to yourselves, if possible, a world like our own, but undefaced by sin, and you have imaged to yourselves a world, not heavenly, indeed, because material, but nevertheless a world where this entire illusion is unknown. There all is real, all substantial; there men live, and think, and act, as they really should; unswayed, at any time, by what is false, transient, or degrading; ever faithful to the trust reposed in them, and wearing long and meekly the highest honors which such a world can confer upon them. But not of this description is our world. Whatever about it was substantial and enduring sin has destroyed, and Death, in his fearful, untiring progress through it, is ever and anon leaving it like some once crowded, but now deserted, silent hall. How important, then, to us, is that wisdom which is from above; which implants within us the sublime convictions of faith; which unfolds to us the high and animating blessings of hope; and which urges our reluctant spirits away from

what is only false and temporary, and prepares them for that purer world where all is real—all is eternal!

Again, we are taught here how vain and transient are all our boasted endowments, whether they be physical or mental. When he lies down and dies, all that we have admired and esteemed in one of our lineage, depart with him. We see him no more, know him no more. Reverently may we have gazed upon him! His, it may be, was a form of the noblest mould, dignified, expressive, and commanding; a fitting temple for one who was the world's duly appointed emperor. So far as the resemblance could be carried, his body bore the image of its high and august original. But it sinks in death, it yields to corruption; on its finest features revels the loathsome worm! And what a humiliating lesson to us is the melancholy spectacle!—Then the noble qualities which were lodged within that form, the superior intellect, the splendid genius, the almost more than human energies and activities which no features, or varyings of a countenance merely earthly, could make distinctly manifest. Often have we bowed before the presence of so much worth! But with a bold, relentless hand, Death strikes down his victim in our sight, and as we see borne away the revered object, O! how deeply are we led to lament that no protection for it from the Destroyer could anywhere be found.

Nor is this all we are taught here. At the grave where the great and the good are laid, we see for ever arrested, all the benefits and blessings which here they might, instrumentally, have wrought in our behalf. For our good, as a people, they have ever and studiously lived; with our nation's rise and prosperous growth their entire being has been intimately interwoven and identified, and most faithfully have they served it. Like him, it may be, whom we this day mourn, such an one may have been the architect of his own greatness; and what is more, may have seen that greatness fully and cheerfully accorded to him by those for whom he had given himself up to labor. If they needed example or counsel, guidance or assistance, every eye may he have seen turned and fixed upon himself, and his lightest thoughts and doings made matter for their unquestioning approval and imitation. There is, to me, something truly beautiful in such

love for a worthy public character as this! It is beautiful to see a vast people looking up to him with unmingled admiration; clinging affectionately around him; freely bestowing upon him their confidence; honoring him with their plaudits and their gifts; hailing him with their sincere gratulations, and following him with their choicest benedictions. Such an attachment is most exalted: we feel it to be so. And when an object of so much reverence and kind feeling is bidden to lie down and die, O how keenly do we feel his loss, and mourn his departure! It is as though we had lost an elder brother—one of our own household flock. Amid many and bitter tears, we stand by his new-made grave; all that he was and did, rises freshly to our recollection; we reflect how essential to our good was his existence, and with him, in his cold and silent grave, how many of our best hopes do there seem to be buried. Nowhere as here do we learn so truly, that man, even in his best estate, is altogether vanity, or value more rightly those qualities and affections which shall for ever endure, increase, and flourish in the immediate presence world of the living and eternal God.

To deepen the gloomy, yet needful impressions here made upon us, our thoughts are directed, yet further, to a contemplation of the many, varied, and important faculties of which the grave rudely deprives us. Vast and sublime is the extent over which mind may possess an uncontrolled sway, and exalted is the position which the possessor of its choicest and most cultivated gifts may ultimately occupy. An individual is before me—he feels within himself the stirrings of an expansive mind; its powers are struggling to be evolved, and to the required task he singly, steadily, devotes himself; entering boldly upon some admired and honorable course, he pursues it through long and weary years with the most untiring perseverance and energy; through his patient application and study, science is explored, or the possessions of mind are investigated; human misery is alleviated, or public justice is rightly developed and maintained; the fabric of society is improved, or the country is extended, defended, or properly strengthened; the task is accomplished; the desired eminence is reached. With a mind cultivated and matured, he looks forth abroad and around him calmly from the dizzy height,

and widely do his fellow-men acknowledge his worth, and lay at his feet their costliest tributes. In the many benefits which he has, instrumentally, conferred upon them, they rejoice, and gratefully and proudly do they gaze upon him, as though he never could die, or his services never could cease. But empty and vain are all such thoughts and expectations! Death lays upon their favorite his cold, icy hand, and quickly all the superior attainments which won their admiration and reverence are no more;—knowledge, and wisdom, and talent, and skill, are all gone;—the great one sleeps in death; and that mind, which lately was almost unapproachable, is shrouded in darkness, and will never again shed its genial rays over the earth. How mysterious are the dispensations of Providence! Why is the earth darkened in the midst of the clear day? Why is the sun gone down at the noon? Why, at the moment that it diffuses the widest promise, attracts to itself most effectually human expectation and attachment, and is apparently most needed, is so pure and bright a luminary removed for ever from its place? Mysterious, indeed, is the event which thus takes from us the great and the good, and bids us forth to their silent grave, to mourn over the melancholy fate of all that is human.

But we check ourself! We may not regard that as mysterious which so plainly points us to another and a better state of things—which fills our thoughts with a world where the wise and the good shall all be ultimately gathered together—where their faculties will find a larger expansion, and all the improved powers and energies of their deathless minds shall be brought out into loftier action and more glorious achievements. To such a world it is our highest privilege to look forward. And needful is it as beautiful! Earth cannot be the abiding home of immortal and redeemed spirits; it is too contracted—too impoverished! Even at best, what know the wise and good here of themselves—of nature—of humanity—of God—of the world he inhabits? When can they cease to know only in part, and know even as they are known? only when they have ceased from earth, and are for ever with the Lord. Thither, therefore, do they pass from us at death; and though our eyes see them not, yet eyes immortal shall behold them; and though in earthly scenes and doings they have no longer any

share, yet into the glorious, unveiled presence of their Divine Original they will have ministered unto them an abundant entrance; and there, in services the most exalted, with bodies holy and indestructible, and with faculties pure and properly expanded, they will take an honorable and conspicuous part. Let then Death proceed with his fearful work—let him, as he will take from us our noblest and our best—we may not mourn uncomforted, since we are assured that our loss is their infinite gain.

It will be seen that in what we have said thus far, we have taken it for granted that greatness and goodness go together. But are they always found so combined? Alas, how many have lived, and died, who were great, but not good! They were great, but it was only in the things that pertained to this earth, they had neither sought, nor desired to be great in the sight of heaven. They had taken part in the honors which cometh from man, but none in the honors which cometh from God. They had shared in the deep, destructive malady with which all of our race is afflicted, but not in its cure—not in the inestimable blessings wrought out for mankind by Jesus Christ—not in the atoning merits of his precious blood—not in the purifying influences of his Holy Spirit! And dying as they lived, without one rightful claim to the future inheritance of the just; what other condition has awaited them beyond the grave, but that which is made up of ignominy and shame, of woe and pain. Painful indeed is it when such cease from amongst the living—when they depart whither their greatness acquired here can avail them nothing—and we are constrained mournfully to exclaim—they are not!

But the Christian—the great man and the good man—let us look again upon him! He dies, but it is in the fulness of hope. He ceases from earth, but it is only that he may enter heaven,—where all is real—all is glorious—all is eternal;—where God will establish and glorify him for ever;—where Christ will make him to inherit all things—will exalt him to a throne, even that throne wherein he himself, with the Father, is now seated, and from which he omnipotently sways his sceptre over all things both in heaven and on earth!

God grant that we may lay these reflections carefully to heart! It is not enough that men be merely great—great for

earth, they must be good also,—good in the sight of heaven; and if they be not this all else is as nothing—they have lived in vain on the earth. I cannot refrain here from directing your attention once more to the venerable statesman whose death has called forth these remarks. Speaking of the closing hours of his life, a Washington letter writer says:—

“Mr. Clay is sinking so gradually that the changes from day to day are scarcely perceptible. In the apartment of the dying statesman all is quiet, peaceful, subdued. There lies the emaciated form of him who very lately was the cynosure of all our eyes. For him the world, diplomacy, politics, honors, pleasures, earthly aspirations, are all things of the *past*. The *present* and the *eternal* only are now of importance to him. One drop of atoning blood is to him far more valuable than presidential or senatorial honors. One whisper from the Saviour, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee,’ is sweeter, more transporting far than the plaudits of the murmuring multitude! What a contrast between the *living* politician, tossed upon the troubled sea of popular excitement, driven before the gales of passion or of prejudice, and struggling amid the conflicting waves of interest and policy, choked with their foam, and soiled by their filth, and the dying statesman, with all this turmoil and noise hushed behind him, the calmly awful solemnities of the death-bed around him, and eternity just before him.”

O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end! My brethren, from these contemplations of death, and with these thoughts filling our minds, let us pass to the scenes of our daily life. May they lead us so to look at what is temporal and fleeting as to surely turn us to what is eternal and abiding. May they lead us to devote ourselves to Christ—to live a life of faith in him—to live the life of the righteous, that we may die his death. Then will the venerated sage of Ashland have accomplished much in his death, as well as much in his life; and these remarks, now dropped in your ears, with the two-fold design of honoring the dead, and doing good to the living, have received their best and highest reward.

THE END.

